

KIMBERLY CARROLL
Kimberly's Crabs – Mt. Pleasant, SC

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Location: Ms. Carroll's Home, Mt. Pleasant, SC

Interviewer: Sara Wood

Transcription: Shelley Chance, ProDocs

Length: One hour, seven minutes

Project: Lowcountry Maritime

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Sara Wood: This is Sara Wood with the Southern Foodways Alliance. It's Wednesday, September 10, 2014. I'm here in Mount Pleasant with Miss Kimberly Carroll and we're sitting in her home. And I'm wondering Kimberly, can you introduce yourself, say hello and introduce yourself for the tape.

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Kimberly Carroll: Hello. I'm Kimberly Carroll, former commercial crabber and in the seafood industry for twenty years.

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Sara Wood: And for the record will you tell me your birth date?

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Kimberly Carroll: I was born on February 14, 1962, so I'm a Valentine's baby.

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Sara Wood: You're so lucky. I've always wanted my birthday to be on Valentine's Day. What's it like?

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Kimberly Carroll: Well it's fantastic. You get chocolates and gifts and taken out to dinner and you get lots of hugs and kisses and cards. It's a day full of love.

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Sara Wood: Kimberly, I know you told me you're from Biloxi, Mississippi. Will you talk a little bit about growing up, what it was like there, what you remember?

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Kimberly Carroll: My dad was in the Air Force and so we were just stationed there for like six weeks but after that we traveled around the country to Key West, Florida, and then I lived up in Anchorage, Alaska when I was between the formative ages of nine to thirteen, so I caught a forty-nine-pound king salmon on a river trail that I hiked seven miles back with my brother and my dad. So that was my love of the outdoors. I—I fished, hunted, skied, and then from there we moved to Charleston, South Carolina where my father continued on with the Charleston Air Force Base until his retirement in 1987.

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Sara Wood: And how old were you when you moved to Charleston?

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Kimberly Carroll: I was fifteen years old, so I've been here a long time.

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Sara Wood: And what was that like to move from Mississippi to Charleston? What was that like for you?

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Kimberly Carroll: Oh this has always been paradise. This was my mother's home. It was a tropical setting, always have enjoyed going out and fishing on the boat with my dad and my brother, shrimp baiting, catching big trout and just enjoying the lush outdoors the—the Low Country has to offer.

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Sara Wood: And what are your parents' names?

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Kimberly Carroll: Philip Rodkey, Senior, Lieutenant Colonel, deceased in 2000 and Elizabeth Beust Rodkey, deceased in 2002.

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Sara Wood: What's your brother's name?

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Kimberly Carroll: Philip Rodkey Jr., Skipper, deceased 1999.

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Sara Wood: So was it the two of you, you and your brother or did you have other siblings?

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Kimberly Carroll: I have a half-sister who is a doctor in upstate New York and a half-brother who lives in Chatham, Virginia.

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Sara Wood: Okay, so when you were growing up—so being out on the water was sort of a way of life, because your brother—you went out with your father and your brother?

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Kimberly Carroll: Absolutely. Also I'm an Aquarius so I'm a lover of the sea and I've always enjoyed the outdoors and being on the water.

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Sara Wood: What do you love about it?

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Kimberly Carroll: The freeness to be at peace with yourself and—and see the blessing of the Lord and the bounty that He gives you and I love the nature and the birds and just the freeness of the spirit.

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Sara Wood: And now when you finished school you were here in Charleston. Did you stay around the area or what happened after you graduated?

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Kimberly Carroll: I went to radiology school at Trident Technical College. My grandfather was a doctor at Roper Hospital and so I pursued a career in radiology as my mother and my aunt had done. And I worked at Roper Hospital from 1989 until 1994 and then it had kind of run its

course because I was quite the workhorse and so they put a heavy load on you. And I enjoyed being outdoors and I felt confined being working inside, although I truly enjoyed nurturing and caring for other people.

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Sara Wood: So when you sort of were getting ready to not work in radiology anymore what came next?

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Kimberly Carroll: I went out on Wayne Magwood's shrimp boat and I had worked a graveyard shift at Roper Hospital and had come in and Raul Morales was down at the dock and Wayne had worked with Raul, so Raul could meet me and Raul asked if I knew of anywhere that he could buy some shark for a party? And I said, "You'll have to talk to the captain about that." And he said, "No, I'd really like to talk to you. Would you like to go to a party?" And I declined and told him that I didn't like to go to parties where shark was served. It wasn't my kind of party.

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And so he met with Wayne Magwood and then proceeded to tell me that the party was a big gala for the Christopher Columbus 1992 gala celebration here in Charleston. And so he was putting on the catering for a lady named Martha Fleming who owned the Augusta Brick Company. And so she had all—all the people coming to her house who were the crews of the ships and all and—and so she needed the seafood for her party.

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Sara Wood: So Raul had his business at the time is that how that—?

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Kimberly Carroll: Correct. He—he and Eddie had Raul and Eddie’s Seafood founded down there at the Geechee Dock in 1987 and then he went away after Hurricane Hugo and came back and re-established it in 1992. And that’s when I met Raul. And then I was tired of working at Roper and you know my body was giving out from the workload and all that. And he handed me a handful of money and said, “Why don’t you quit and come sell seafood with me?” And my mother and dad had always said that I could sell the dirt off the floor because of my you know determination. So I held onto the money for a few days and then I put in my notice at Roper Hospital and worked with Raul and he and I built the—built the customer base up from the ground up. At the time he was selling like 400 pounds of shrimp to Ronnie Bowles, RB’s Restaurant, and all these other restaurants around in Charleston were using imported shrimp. They were on contracts. They could not get a consistent shrimp product or fish and so I started dry-knocking on the doors, making dry phone calls and working my way into the seafood industry. And I’ll never forget the time, I said, “Okay Raul I’ll go ahead and join aboard with you”. And he bought 400 pounds of shrimp and I said, “Oh my Lord! What did you buy all that shrimp for? How are we ever going to sell it without it rotting,” you know? And he said, “Don’t worry about it. I have every confidence that you’re going to sell it.” And I sold that 400 pounds of shrimp that afternoon and he bought another 1,000 pounds the next day.

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So in the later years of Raul and I working together we would buy all the shrimp off the shrimping boats which would be the Anna Grace, the Miss Vivian, the Miss Diana, the Low Country Lady, we would buy fifty to 60,000 pounds of shrimp a year and make the investment and put the shrimp in the freezer so the restaurants would have the shrimp to last 'til March or April of the next year and they would have a good quality product. And that had always been the—the missing link in the chain between the restaurants and the—and the seafood industry. So we did what we could on our part to have a product that the restaurants could use mostly year-round.

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Sara Wood: How did your life change from going to work—from working at Roper to working with Raul?

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Kimberly Carroll: Well at first it was a little bit overwhelming. I would get out the—the Yellow Pages and a sheet of paper and I would probably make about oh 80 to 100 phone calls a day and get told no, no, no. And then I would call them back the next day or the day after and find out when would be a good—. They'd tell me they had already placed their order. So I would get a few people who would entertain me and have me come bring the seafood down but the best thing I did was put the seafood in the back of the truck and go downtown and you know if I happened to miss the chef on a Tuesday when he told me to come by and actually he was off you know I would show up on a Thursday morning at eight o'clock with a cooler full of shrimp, big—big ole fresh mahi or—or wahoo or yellow fin tuna and—and show them the catch that I

had to offer as well as the stone crab claws and let the seafood sell itself. And then encourage people that if they went with our seafood company, Raul's Seafood that it was guaranteed deliveries and if there was ever a problem I gave them my word that I would call them back and—and I wouldn't let them sit short on not having their order filled. Plus, I always made it an effort that I would have their seafood there by four to five o'clock in the afternoon for evening service. I was very respectful of their—their time and the restaurant hours.

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Sara Wood: Now how—can you tell me a little bit about Raul's background? Did he—where is he from and when did he start out?

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Kimberly Carroll: Raul was one of fourteen children from [*Inaudible*], Cuba. His father was a commercial fisherman and this was back in the days of Batista and the overthrow of Batista. And so Raul was going to be—he was going to be sworn into the Army. You had to do that in Communist Cuba after Castro took it over. And Raul used to go to the market and he used to hustle to get—to get food to eat for the family and all and barter and all that. So he was very business savvy.

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Well he stood in line ten days to get a pair of shoes that were government issued and they were four sizes too big and he was thirteen years old. And he realized that he just had to have a way out of the country. You had electricity four hours a day. You were—you had four ounces of meat for a ration for the family for a month under Communist rule. So he and another fellow

took a boat that was anchored and they had a machete and a gallon of water and they took off and they were set for Key West, Florida. The first month they—the first boat they took it sunk and so they had to come back and he was hiding out from the Military ‘cause they were looking for him. And so three days later he and the fellow managed to get another boat and they left. And it didn’t have a—I don’t know if it had a motor on it or not. But it was very small, it was like fourteen, fifteen-foot little dinghy. So they were just going to go to Key West and they got blown off course and lost. They were caught up in a storm. They spent five days at sea. The fellow that was with him drank salt water because they ran out of water and he went crazy and had the machete and said, “We’re going to die! We’re going to die!” And he pulled the machete on Raul and Raul jerked the machete away from him. And this guy was older and he goes we will only die by the grace of God and not by your hand.

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And so he got the machete away from him and then they were sunburnt and all and so somehow or another there were some lobster fishermen that were from Florida and they were off the coast of Bimini and they picked them up. And Raul and this other guy they were just so famished and dehydrated and all that, they thought it was a stolen—they thought it was a government boat from Cuba. They thought it was a Cuban Army. Anyway these guys lifted them up on the boat, so Raul and the other fellow thought they were going to overtake the boat and the guys subdued them and they put them in a hold and then they gave them water and all that. And got them you know stable and all and then they took them into the Port of Miami and then he was processed into immigration. This was before the Marielitos boat lift thing that you saw in the ‘70s [1970s] and all that. Raul came before that. So he was not part of the Marielitos boat lift.

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Sara Wood: And how old was he when he—?

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Kimberly Carroll: He was fourteen years old when he came to this country. And then he picked watermelon—he picked grape—I'm sorry. He picked eggplant and cucumbers in the fields down there and he learned English by watching Sesame Street on TV and he would sit there and cry every day trying to learn the English language 'cause it was so difficult. And then he stayed there about six months with his uncle and then he came on up to Shem Creek and he was Wayne Magwood's first deckhand off his boat, shrimper, fast—fast as lightning and all and so he was here. And then his brother Amado from Cuba came up and they were the first Cuban fishermen out of Shem Creek.

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Sara Wood: I mean when you first—when you know knowing Raul, did he tell you about what Shem Creek was like when he arrived here, what it—I mean I imagine it's not even comparable to today.

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Kimberly Carroll: Yes, he did. He told me that back in the day and this was even in 1995 he would tell me this that he used to be able to get—take out twenty crab-pots and bring in about ten bushels of crabs. It was just an abundance of crabs because of the pristine waters and you

didn't have the over-fishing going on and—and that was plenty. You know it wasn't like crab until the resource was finished up or depleted if you will.

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Sara Wood: Do you want to—I'm sorry?

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Kimberly Carroll: Sure.

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Sara Wood: So I also wanted to ask you, you know, when you started working with Raul how did—I mean how did your role evolve? I mean I have seen pictures of you out there on the boat and with the crabs and I'm just curious as to like what—as you went along how your role changed and what that did for you or what that meant to you?

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Kimberly Carroll: It meant a lot because he came as a—he opened the shop and it was just a little kiosk building and mostly his sails were right out of the—out of the shop and it was my duty to—to bring the seafood to the restaurants and all downtown and make the deliveries and then I built it up and we—our pinnacle of our career was that we sold three quarters of a million dollars' worth of seafood in a year. Probably had 150 restaurants between Mount Pleasant, Charleston, Folly Beach, let me see, Summerville and so it was a good client base that we had, so I was very, very proud of how I helped build it up from what it was.

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Sara Wood: And what were some of the challenges that you had to contend with then? I mean I imagine now we you know eating local is a big thing, but at the time was it hard when you had—? I imagine people have talked about the imports and everything. Can you talk about some of the challenges you had to contend with?

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Kimberly Carroll: We had a few challenges. One of the challenges was a lot of the restaurants could never get a consistent product year-round and so they'd be contract with another food service purveyor and their contract would end at such and such a time. And so you had to guarantee that you were going to have the product there for them if they didn't have the contract. And that you would be able to supply year-round. That was one issue.

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Another issue is you had other seafood businesses around this town that had already had established relationships with these restaurants and all so that was it. Another thing as years went by was that because Raul had never finalized his citizenship he was taken away in 1998 indefinite detention and he was going to be deported back to Cuba, so for nine months I had to go back and forth to Atlanta to try and get him out, run our business every day with him calling me with the jail phone call. They locked him up out in Alabama and then get a—a private sponsored bill from Senator Fritz Hollings to have Raul to where he could stay in this country. So all that went on and when he came back—so he was gone nine months. So here we had gone from the pinnacle of our career. We were going to retire in like another year and then he got out and I think we had less than \$300 in the bank and maybe twenty pounds of shrimp. And he got

out and we started over from scratch again. So that was in the year 2000. And then we made it up again with the—with the seafood business and all that and we had a lot of backing and all. And then he came down with pancreatic bile duct cancer, so he had to get a Whipple operation and he was out of—out of work I'd say about a couple months and he was very emaciated looking and he brought himself back from that and did the chemotherapy but did not do the radiation therapy. And so he—he would wear a brace every day around his belly and he didn't want anybody to let him know—he did not want anyone to know that he had cancer and so because he didn't want anyone's pity and he wanted—it was all about living. He didn't even want me to mention the cancer. I was just to work on it on my own and find a way to keep him going and all that but he would tell everybody that he had been in an accident or whatever because he didn't want to relive it. He just wanted to move forward.

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So then he—he went about eight or nine months and was in remission and then it came back and he had been out on the boat. We had just got his privateer boat and he came down with the shingles. And we went in and found out that the cancer had recurred. And we were going to go to radiation therapy, as they suggested and he looked at me in his eye and I was giving him a ride to the doctor and we pulled out of the driveway and we had just got the boat five months before, a beautiful boat and he said, “Well I guess you're going to sell the boat now. This is about it.” And I said, “No, no that's your boat. It's not going anywhere and it's going to be there for you and you're going to beat this, so don't even worry about the boat going anywhere.” I encouraged him in every way I could.

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So he—that was in August and then the radiation and then the business he—he—he really had the cancer spreading throughout. And so in November the business pretty much well shut down in 2006 ‘cause he was at home. I was his caretaker. And then he—he died on Christmas Eve of 2006. But we had a very, very good seafood business. I’m very proud of what we did and I know he was extremely proud.

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Sara Wood: Now did he go out on the boats too often, or did he kind of stay—? I mean how did—how did that work?

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Kimberly Carroll: Well we would wake up in the morning. He—he’d get up at 4:30 every morning and he’d be in bed by 7:30 at night or eight o’clock at night you know. I mean that’s the only way he had as much energy to—to go out and run his crab pots at daylight and then he’d be back in at 10:30. I’d go in at nine o’clock and open up the shop and freshen the shrimp and get the orders ready for the restaurants that I had to take out because I’d take about eight or ten deliveries before noon and then back in the day the restaurants you were not allowed to take anything to them between 11:30 and 2:30 and they were very adamant about that. And I’d—he’d come in from crabbing and then I’d have made those deliveries and then I’d come home, fix lunch, let the dogs out, make my phone calls, and then he’d have the rest of my seafood deliveries ready for me when I’d go pick them up about 1:30 and then I’d go make my evening deliveries and then I’d be back about 4:30 or five. He’d shut down the shop. I’d have dinner ready. We’d eat, watch *Wheel of Fortune* and then you know go to bed and then get up the next

day and do it again. We worked year-round. The only time he took the time off was 4th of July week whenever his brother Frank would come in. He'd take the 4th of July week off right after the 4th of July and then also in January we'd shut the shop down—the end of December and we'd go down to Key West for three weeks every winter 'cause that's where his family lived was Dock Island. All his uncles and all were lobster fishermen and sponge fishermen and he had lived there. We'd stay there three weeks and then we'd come back and we would paint the shop, paint the house, get everything going and all and do ancillary jobs and all and get ready for the shrimping season to start up in April and you'd have a two-month lapse. And then long about March we'd start bringing in cold water fish again and delivering to the restaurants. Probably delivered probably about 600 or 800 pounds of mahi a week and eight or ten tuna and you know gosh, maybe fifteen or twenty swordfish, head off, tail off, gutted, right off the boat, bright eyes gleaming you know no histamine issues with the fish, because he wanted—he would only buy the last catch right off the boat. He didn't—if the boat had been out twelve days he didn't want was on—he wanted what was coming the very last so it would be the very freshest to the customer.

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Sara Wood: Now did y'all work with—like I imagine you see some of the same characters coming in and out with—on the boats. I mean what—what was that culture like for you?

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Kimberly Carroll: Oh it was wonderful. That was back in the day when you had the big steel—steel hulled boats like the Lady Maria, who—who sunk off of Georgia's bank or The Father and Son, you know these 120-foot steel hulled boats you know. And all the—the ground fish boat

fleet you know the—The Crazy One, The Still Crazy, The Endangered One, The Lucky Charm, all these boats, the boats were lined up like six thick on Shem Creek so it was fun. So for the relationships and they'd call Raul and say, "Hey, we'll be in tomorrow and we've got a load for you." And he'd say, "I'll be waiting for you right down at the dock. I got it all lined up. I got the men lined up. We'll get you offloaded and paid and you'll be on your way." You never had to wait about getting paid with Raul because he would write the ticket and pay you on the spot.

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Sara Wood: So did—how does that work? I mean for folks who aren't very aware or familiar with the maritime lifestyle, I mean when—when the fishermen would come in, I mean would they get groceries, was there a long interaction? Did they stay for a little while? What was—what was—how did that work?

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Kimberly Carroll: They're—the Ship Chandler Companies would handle the boats, you know down there at the port. One of them is Coleman's, they're still—still in business but a lot of the guys they'd come in and they'd stay at the dock three or four days and you know it was a common occurrence, everyone would get paid and they'd go down to RB's and you know have happy hour and all. And everyone is sitting and watching the boats come in and they'd offload the catch at Red's Icehouse or down at the Wando's Shrimp Company or whatever and then they would get their ice from Red's which is now a bar and then they'd go get their groceries at the Piggly Wiggly and be careful not to put the groceries in the banana boxes because it's taboo to have bananas on the boat.

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Sara Wood: Really?

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Kimberly Carroll: And that comes back from the days of the pestilence on the boats that came over from England and what have you and you know the fruit flies and all that and caused disease and all. That's where it comes from with the bananas being bad luck.

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Sara Wood: Kimberly I wanted to ask you what happened to the business after Raul passed, but I wanted to ask you one more thing about you know getting into this industry. What did you learn about yourself that sort of surprised you when you were doing all this work?

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Kimberly Carroll: Looking back now I can see that it has enabled me to be the strong individual I am. I've—I've always been good on my word. My word is my bond. I follow through. I'm a hard worker and it's given me the resilience to go forward and to make—to be able to handle the transitions in life that—that the good Lord gives you whether you like it or not.

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Sara Wood: So what happened to the business after Raul passed away?

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Kimberly Carroll: Raul passed away on Christmas Eve and his friend Bobby Carroll had been here to see him in—in November. And Bobby had said to him hey Raul, I just wanted to come and see you. It was 8:30 at night on a Sunday night. And I thought, “My goodness, who is knocking at the door?” Well it was Bobby Carroll. I thought, “Okay.” He said, “I want to see Raul please. I got to see him. People say that he’s died.” And I said, “No, he isn’t dead. He’s resting.” “Well can I please see him?” And I said, “Well okay.” And he walked with a real bad limp, Bobby did. Anyway I went and got Raul and Raul came out and said, “Yeah. How you doing? How you doing?” He goes, “I just left the bar and everybody said you had died and I just wanted to make sure.” I said, “No, Bobby.” I said, “No, Raul hasn’t died. He’s still alive.” And Raul said, “You tell all the bastards that I’m still alive and I’m ready to take every one of them on,” you know, being strong as he was. He goes, “Well Raul I just want to let you know that I care about you and you’ve been my friend. And that we’ve—we’ve had a good—good time crabbing together out there on the waters whenever I’ve come up from Virginia in the wintertime and done the winter crabbing derby, employed Bonnie and all through the years that Len’s Dart Garden, when we kept the crab boats down there and then the crab boats from Maryland, Russell Hall and Coleman Brothers and all the other crab vehicles from—crabbing trucks from Maryland would come and meet in the Len’s parking lot and you’d come and offload your crabs and then they’d go up yonder. It’s been a good—good relationship we’ve all had.”

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And so Raul died on Christmas Eve and then in January about the second week you know I—I was going to just sell the business and the boat ‘cause I didn’t think there was any way I

could do this anymore. And I was just going to hang in for a year and figure out you know what I was going to do you know, a new path. And Bobby called me and said he was sorry that Raul had died. He didn't know. I said, "Okay." And he goes, "Well I'm going to be down in a couple weeks with Floyd. We're going to run the pots and all that." And I said, "Oh good. Get Floyd to buy the boat 'cause the boat is for sale." And he goes, "Well we'll talk about that whenever I get down." I said, "Okay."

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So anyway I didn't think much about it and he came down about three weeks later and he goes, "Look," he said, "Don't sell me the boat." He said, "Raul, I know Raul and he would want the business to go on. Let me help you reopen it and I'll help you and all that. It's too good a business just to let it go." So Bobby was all about the peeler crabbing and soft shell crabbing and Raul was dead set against it in his life. And I pulled out all these articles that Raul had done about peeler crab fishing and thinking it was going to end the crabbing industry and all. And I said, "He's dead set against it. There's no way." He goes, "Look at it this way. You got a female crab in November full of eggs and all. It gets put in the basket and sent up to Maryland. Those would all be baby crabs that would be born and all that, so how is that depleting the seafood industry—depleting the crabbing industry any different than maybe a few of the little peelers getting into breed with a male? More of the baby crabs are dying by the females being sent up yonder." And I said, "I don't know. I'll have to think about that."

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Well I did and he came down and he helped get the boat going and when he did I decided to go ahead and go forward with the peeler thing, so on my first birthday he bought a mobile

diving truck for \$300 with an F-350 in it and he built out crab shedding tables inside of it. We took it down to the Geechee Dock where our business was and he rigged up the whole saltwater system and all so that first year we set out peeler pots and all that. I think we had about seventy-five or something like that and we ran our peeler crab operation out there while everyone was laughing at us telling us it wouldn't work.

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And—and we shed out the crabs and it was just fantastic and so we ran it out of there for two years and then we—we needed to change locations and so we moved up towards the—the bridge into the old Carolina Clipper Shack building. It was—it was a better setup for us—needed some more room. And so we moved up there and Bobby decided that we were going to have a standalone shedder building. So we had our mobile shedder there and we handled 3,500 customers out of that business at the Shem Creek Bridge in two years and then we got evicted out of there because we were too much competition for everybody and there was a lot of politics going on and so we were evicted. And so we moved our boat to Toddler's Cove and McCrady's and the Charleston Restaurant community had a fund-raiser for us because they wanted to help us keep the soft shell shedding part of the operation and because I had already received a Three Sisters Award from the city of Charleston for being a small business owner in a corporate commercial world. They really wanted to hang onto us because we were like one of the last vestiges of have it local, have—have a personal relationship with who you're buying your seafood from. That and it was such a fantastic product, the—the soft shell crabs, the chefs showed me exactly after they molted out, they'd be like thirty minutes to an hour and I'd go ahead and flat them out and they'd be soft as butter.

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And so they just loved us so much, so there was a fundraiser at the Long Room in McCrady's and enough money was raised between that and our money that we built a \$30,000 building in our backyard with recirculating water and all that. And the first year of it I think we caught like 18,000 peeler crabs, plus we bought a Parker Hull Boat and he built—he built the whole cabin on the boat. It took a year to build it—build it and we peeler crabbed out of that and we focused on soft shell crabs and stone crab claws and then we would go down to Brunswick—Brunswick, Georgia before the shrimp season would open and we'd buy like 5,000 or 6,000 pounds of shrimp and bring them back and freeze them up and have the shrimp so we'd be hauling shrimp, getting up at the break of day going peeler crabbing, putting the crabs in the shedder, shedding out the crabs, staging the crabs and getting them to the restaurants and it would be like that for about three or four weeks between April and May. I mean you know you just got no sleep at all but it's what you did you know when it was like the—the peeler season.

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And so that—that's the work that it entailed and it was such—such a joy and a privilege to bring all that good local seafood to the restaurants, but we were the absolute—we were the cat's meow as far as the soft shell crabs go—absolutely. Crabs paid for our—for our Parker boat. We had the nicest boat on Charleston Harbor. So when I sold the boat this last year in March, a year after he passed I realized you know I hung in there for a year and had some captains and it just wasn't conducive to my future to keep on. So I wanted a good memory of this boat and all so I got with Henkel Marine and brokered her and I had a choice. I had a say-so in where my boat went and so my boat is crabbing up off the eastern shore of Maryland with a man and a wife

team crabbers. They came down and they saw the boat and they left with it three weeks later. So I have a good happy memory and that's what I wanted. I left out on the industry on a high note. And I know I lost two husbands over it. They both died. It was—it was a good run. I have fantastic memories of twenty years of it and I'm very proud and honored to be a part of this legacy because there are so few of us left. It's amazing over the years how I've rode up and down the eastern seaboard. We would ride up to North Carolina every year and go get our crabbing rig and then we'd go through like the little towns in North Carolina that—that aren't even fishing communities anymore. It's all you know restaurant/bars, waterfront development and all. There's just nothing left of the quaint little villages and also it isn't just the over-development, it was the—the National Marine Fisheries where they—they did away with net fishing and you couldn't keep whiting anymore and the by-catch and all that. And so that put a lot of these people out of business because you know we used to handle a lot of whiting and now you don't even have the whiting.

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Plus another thing we used to do in the day, we used to—me and Raul back in 1997 we bought—we started out with a pickup truck and then we got a camper shell for it and we went—we would rent a U-Haul and we would leave from here and go down to Cape Canaveral and we'd offload the boats in—'cause they'd be—they'd migrate down to the south—follow the run of the shrimp. So here we were bringing back 5,000 and 6,000 pounds of the shrimp and the whiting and all that in the U-Haul and within three trips we got a 1997 Ford F-350 turbo diesel with an eleven foot refrigerator box on the back of it. And we financed it and all and it was okay but that was our seafood truck. And he was so proud of it and I was too. And now that same Port of Canaveral all those fish houses are gone. Canaveral Shrimp Company is gone. Puck O'Neal's

Seafood is gone. Independent Seafood that used to bring in the calico scallops, it's all been bought up by Canaveral Cruise Lines and the whole thing has totally—you wouldn't have even known it was ever even a commercial seafood industry down there whatsoever—nothing even resembles what it used to be back in the day.

00:36:44

I have very fond memories of all that, uh-hm.

00:36:48

Sara Wood: I kind of feel like with a lot of these oral histories it's a race against time but I feel like getting here I've already—I mean there are already people who are gone, you know.

00:36:57

Kimberly Carroll: Oh there are many gone. Yeah, there are many gone. I'm—I'm glad y'all are getting the oral history. People 100 years from now they're not even going to see any of this. They're not even going to see any of this in another ten years. The Chesapeake Bay has crashed. It's not because of the peeler crabbing or whatever. It's because of the over-development. Also they've got a dam up there that's you know you have a lot of hog farms and all that and so the fertilizer runoff and all that causes huge dead zones. Down here in Charleston, South Carolina the whole area is so over-developed and all and by that I mean everybody wants waterfront housing and all. And so when you do that the waterfront housing is all in these back bays and estuaries to where the—that's the nursery stock for the—the shrimp and the crabs and the fish and the oysters and the whole ecosystem of the seafood is—is being in peril and it—the damage has already been done. So that's why you know we—we don't have the industry we did before.

00:38:09

And then you have imports to top it off. But even if you didn't have the imports, just the—the pollutants and the runoff from the roads and all those houses on the water back there it's very pretty and all that but it's just completely wiped out the seafood industry.

00:38:25

Sara Wood: I mean when you were faced with some of those challenges when you were still in the business, what made you—what made you stay when you—? It might have been easier to throw the towel in or maybe it wouldn't have been, but I just wonder why people stay in the industry when things look so—when things look really tough.

00:38:43

Kimberly Carroll: Well with Bobby, he—he was a true hunter and he could put the meat on the boat. And so we—we had a year-round sustainable business with the crabbing and all that. If we weren't focusing on the stone crab claws then we would vary and then go onto the blue crab at a certain season and then we'd get ready and we'd go to peeler season for the soft shell crabs. With Raul it was an earlier time, it was back in the early '90s [1990s] and so we didn't have so much over-development and the like and so we were—and you still had a lot of boats still in Shem Creek and they didn't have the—the terrible fishing regulations that they did. So you could have—you could—you could go and buy 600 or 800 pounds off the boat or whatever and then you had the shrimp boats coming in and out. And—and you had dock space for the boats to be at and the fuel price wasn't \$3.50 a gallon as it is now, so the boats could afford to go out and troll all day. Now they cannot afford to do that. So it's—it's many factors. It's—it's the—it's the

waterfront development, it's the imports, it's the price of fuel, and the loss of waterfront dock space. And—and the horse has done run out of the barn. I mean this was all happening in the—in the early '90s and all that but you can't—you can't change development when people with money, they're—they have every—they have every reason to be able to buy whatever they want, you know their land and all that. I'm just saying the end-result that's what it is.

00:40:29

Also it's also the changing of the climate. As the water gets warmer and all that a lot of these species you know—the water gets too hot and then you wind up with the dead zones and all that and so you know like a lot of these cold water fish and all that—that are up in Maine, the water is heating up a whole lot. And so you're—they're seeing fish that would normally be down in the Gulf of Mexico up there in Maine 'cause they're trying to get to a little bit cooler water. And another thing I think the BP Oil Spill had a lot to do with it also, the damage to the ecosystem. You know it's just not the East Coast or—or the Eastern Shore or the Gulf or—or the Coast of Florida, it—it all goes together, it's all cyclical, so if you have some kind of major disaster down there in the Gulf it's—it's going to wind up happening to us, too because it's trickle-down effect. The—the peeler crabs of the soft shell it starts out in—in the Gulf and all that and then hits the tip of Florida and then about every three weeks it comes up a bit. You start off like—like down there around Jacksonville, Florida and then it will hit up to Georgia and then you know you got to get ready 'cause about a week later it's going to be hitting you if you don't get passed. And then it'll be Georgetown a week later and then two weeks later it'll be up in North Carolina. And then from North Carolina the next moon it'll be up in New Jersey, so you know it's—it's all dependent on nature and the ecosystem and all. I feel like the pollution has a lot to do with it.

00:42:07

And another thing that has a lot to do with it is mismanagement of the red fish. I understand that the red fish around here are also known as spot tail pass or puppy drum—their main diet is blue crabs. And I'm not sure of the exact size limit, but it's like twenty-four inches or lower you can keep them and anything above that you have to throw them back. Golly these people are bringing in behemoth red fish that weigh thirty-five and forty pounds, these big trophy looking sport fish and then tossing them back. These fish they eat up all the blue crabs. That's their main diet and so that's also depleting the crab stock in this area. Nobody catches the crabs they used to around here.

00:42:52

Sara Wood: How did you learn how to crab?

00:42:54

Kimberly Carroll: Let's see. When I was with Raul I would go and ride out on our little twenty foot Alumicraft Miss Kimberly and watch him throw the—throw the pots in and out of the water and bring them in on his electric winch but it was Bobby who really taught me how to crab. And he taught me—the first thing he taught me I had a customer who wanted a half a bushel of crabs and he was going back to Virginia. And he goes get him that half a bushel of crabs. And I said, “But Raul used to do that for me.” He goes, “Well Raul is not here anymore and I'm going to Virginia. You are going to have to figure this out.” And I said, “Well wait. How many crabs make up half a bushel?” And he was a NASCAR race fan, fellow, and he said, “Forty-three. Just remember Richard Petty, forty-three and you got it.”

00:43:41

It took me two—it took me an hour to put forty-three crabs in the basket and they were pinching me and all this and I was just like—oh I was so impatient and all. And so I did that and then whenever we lost the lease and we were down on Todder's Cove I went full-time on the back of the boat as a top grader and so it was he and I and we would go out and so on the back of the boat for a good year, and we would go out and crab about 150 pots. During the crabbing derby I remember one day we brought in twenty-seven bushels of crabs and we'd have to come in and offload the crabs at the Todder's, Todder's Cove where we were at and it was a floating dock. And so we had a pot rack on the back of our Parker which was a twenty-seven foot really fancy hot deep-v boat with a cabin on her and canopy on the back. It was really nice, a crabbing yacht if you will—so beautiful.

00:44:41

Anyway we would go and the—the key was to try and handle the crabs as least as you could because you didn't want to handle them two and three times over 'cause you know your arms get tired [*Laughs*], twenty-seven bushels of crabs. So we'd get in and Bobby would load them from the bow of the boat to the top of the pot rack. I would be up on the dock and it would be like about three and a half feet, four feet above me, so he'd be hoisting the crabs from the pot rack up to me and then I'd be stacking them three high on the dock and get the hand cart and then we'd have to go and make nine trips with three bushels of crabs and put them in the back of the truck. And then from there we'd have to go to the market. And go and offload twenty-seven bushels. And then you'd turn around and get four bushels of bait that weighed eighty pounds a piece and put them in the back of the truck and let them thought out enough for the next morning

and you'd be up at 4:30 getting it ready to go because the tide waits on no man. And you had to be ready to go and run your lines and all 'cause you've got about a thirty-minute window and the crab pots go underwater. And you—we were crabbing like forty-five, fifty foot of water, uh-huh.

00:45:58

Sara Wood: When I was out there yesterday with Fred [Dockery] it just seemed like it would take a while to catch on because it's like you have to figure out where your pots are. I mean you have to contend with other people doing some not so great things to your equipment. I mean and then the weather and all those conditions, I just—there just seems to be so many things to keep in mind, yet people go out and do it every day. I wonder what that's like.

00:46:23

Kimberly Carroll: You're right. Whenever peeler season would start we would—it would usually be on Cooper River Bridge Run Weekend, April 1st and it would never fail. It would be blowing a gale. Plus you'd be wearing long johns. Here you are doing Easter crabbing wearing long johns and be some big blow because it would be the new moon or the full moon, one of the moons. So we had that and I remember one year we were down off the [Inaudible] House Bridge and we were in the other boat, the—the privateer, the one with the cabin on it. And we had the boat overloaded with pots and all and it was blowing probably about thirty and we had 150 pots. We had seventy-five in the seafood van and we had seventy loaded on the boat. It was too much of a load for the boat. We were offloading and we were going to New Grounds. We were running half the rig at [Inaudible] House Landing down the [Inaudible] and then the next day we'd run the other half up the Wando [River] So we were split and it took us an hour to get there.

00:47:22

So it's the first day. The tide is running like crazy and then the gunnels on the back of this privateer were very, very shallow, you know maybe like ah two and a half foot or whatever and Bobby—we're offloading the boat and whenever he went in the—the stern of the boat almost went under because the waves were crashing. So I hurriedly parked the truck and the trailer, hopped onboard, and he said, "Come on! We got to go—we got to go! We got to—we got to start throwing these pots 'cause we were like way low—low down in the stern, stern heavy." So it took us like god, ten minutes to get up on plane to be able to get up high enough and get enough weight in the bow not to sink the boat. And then we threw out the crab pots and all that. I remember that.

00:48:12

And then I remember the last time I went crabbing on the Miss Kimberly in November of 2013 I had five pots off Sullivan's Island and the fellow who was with me, you know my crew had not showed up, they hadn't showed up for four days, probably because they were out fishing my rig you know. Whenever—I mean it's a fact. So I didn't want to go out into the harbor but I did anyway 'cause it had been like four days. So me and my friend were off of a crab bank and all that and there's an egret and it lands on the bow of the boat. And it's blowing thirty-five or forty you know, really strong, the bird stays there about ten minutes. I said I really don't feel good about this. I need to go back in. Can't do it, no, no, no, those crab pots have been sitting out there and all. So there was a line of ten out there off of Sullivan's Island. We got to the first three and it was blowing so hard. And you have to—you've got sixty-foot of line and an electric winch, a twenty-seven-foot boat, the wind coming at you and you're trying to bring the crab pot

up and not have it go up underneath the boat. So we hit and snagged these—about three of the buoys and the tide is running like crazy too, right. Incoming tide and the wind coming out of the west, you know and then it makes the boat with the cabin on it like a balloon, like a ballast you know or like a spinnaker bow you know and just carries you.

00:49:40

So pot number five, the sixty-foot prop line, the sixty-foot crab line got caught in the prop and fouled the motor and the boat is heading over towards the jetty. And my buddy, I lifted up the—the motor and he’s trying to get it unfurled and all that and now probably twenty-feet of rope is wrapped all up in the prop and all that. I’m panicking. I’m seeing the jetty rocks right here [*Gestures*]. The tide—the tide is coming in but the wind is blowing so hard there’s a gale that’s blowing me out. And I’m watching in slow motion as my boat is about to crash against the rocks. He gets the prop out and starts the motor, throw her in reverse and it spins the prop, so I called a pon-pon to the Coast Guard and I was panicked. I thought I was either going to lose my boat or I thought I was going to die. It was like right on the rocks. My whole life you know—

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So anyway here’s the—but I was able to spin the boat ever so easily off the rocks, so I’m—my stern is twenty yards off the shore, threw the anchor twice, it held, still the way everything is going out I’m having a panic attack. The Coast Guard helicopter is flying above. The Zodiac boat is over off of Fort Johnson and here’s the whole Fire and Rescue squad over off of Fort [Moultrie]. And they’re wanting me to call Sea Tow and I’m saying, “I can’t do this. I’m ready to throw off my Grunden(s) and my boots. I want to swim to shore. I got to get off the

boat. Y'all don't understand, I'm going to have a heart attack.” “No, Miss Kimberly. You're to stay with the boat, stay with the boat.”

00:51:24

I had to sit for an hour and wait for Sea Tow to come and get me and I saw my whole life flash before my eyes thinking I was either going to die or I was going to lose the boat and I knew that after the year of struggle after Bobby dying and going through the crew, people stealing and robbing from me, the—the low amount of crabs—mainly people robbing you, you know and you know just you can't make money doing that. I knew—knew it was time to let it go and I was just so shook after that. I thought I was going to die that day. So the boat got in and then we got it—it was an 8,000 pound-boat and some friends helped and got her loaded on the trailer and I was sick. I laid in bed like three days. I was just so shook. I thought I was going to die that day. And I put the boat up for sale and she sold in March and I got a little pontoon boat and went up on Fort [Moultrie] a couple of times and that didn't really do anything for me. But some good friends of mine Labor Day Weekend took me out in their boat and they took me out to Capers, you know just a regular recreational boat and I was able to go back to the ocean and be on the water and go—go walk the shore and it gave me peace in my heart and my mind. But that—that was a big warning. That was my time up, when the rope was in the prop and things had already been going south before that anyway but that really scared me bad. I thought I was going to lose everything right then. And you know it's just a wonder I didn't, you know. I was real lucky. And I—it was a gale, I shouldn't have been out there. I was fearless. But I mean people hadn't shown up in four days and I had to go check my rig. If you don't—if you don't go and check the rig in five days you get ticketed or whatever or they're going to sand down and you're not going to get the pot back. You got \$75 in the pot.

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So whenever Sea Tow came and got me, cut the anchor free, they brought us in. I never even went back to go get the rig. I called a fellow crabber, the one who built that other boat for—that Bobby bought, the other boat for, I said look. I got seventy pots out there on the harbor. I need to sell them to you right now. My boat—she's scrubbed, I had to get some work done on the boat you know it got scrubbed. And so anyway he bought the crabbing rig that was out in the harbor and when he went to go back and get my anchor in the boat that Bobby finished up for him and all that, he almost got hung up on the rocks as well. It was just such a bad situation for him but got that big anchor back and all. But I knew my time was over. But it was a heartbreaker you know, it really was. But I had to you know again being a strong water woman and being in this industry for twenty years and my faith in the Lord and all that, it's not been easy at all, but I'm a very strong individual and I have the resilience to move forward. And it's not in commercial seafood anymore and it breaks my heart because of all the relationships and—and the good word that I'm known for and the good product that we delivered throughout the years and all. I'm so glad to be a part of it. I left out on a high note. I was able to sell it out, buy a painting business, I'm a painting contractor. I subcontract out the work. And then go and find some peace in my life.

00:54:54

But I—I would have done it forever, but I'm glad that—you know you'll—it'll make you old, it really will. I mean it's not all glory, "Let's go out and catch the crabs!" It's lack of the—lack of the product, either that or you get too many crabs and the crabs are dying. Nobody wants to buy the crabs. The price is low. You have people stealing from you, the price of fuel, the

upkeep of the boat, the hours are grueling but I had the pride of bringing such a good quality product. It was—it was my bountiful harvest that the good Lord had given me that I was able to give to the people and the pride and—and the work that went into bringing something to them that they had to do very minimal preparation and just you know coax out the flavors and it would just you know—that's Kimberly's Crabs. That's Raul's Seafood. Go and see them. That's a good quality product. It was being a proud commercial fisherwoman.

00:56:00

Sara Wood: Kimberly I don't have any more questions for you. I mean you've been very generous with your time, but is there anything else that you think is important to put into this interview or something that I didn't know to ask that I should have asked you?

00:56:13

Kimberly Carroll: I just want to say that even though I sold my boat and I've moved on, this is in my blood. I mean I'll never get over selling my boat nor will I ever live down the contribution I've made to this community and what I have done with the seafood industry bringing soft shell crab to the area and the beautiful stone crab claws. I am so proud of it and I'm also so gracious for everybody who—who went ahead and took a—took a chance and let us sell them the product and show them how good it was and show folks what a good working relationship can be when you follow-through and say hey I'm going to have this for you. You can't put it on your menu for tonight and make it for your daily special. And you don't have to think another thing about it, because I'll be there with the product for you.

00:57:10

Sara Wood: I wanted—okay, that brings up a question. Can you talk about because you talked a little bit about the stone crabs but can you talk about—two questions: can you talk about what the—like what the process to get the stone crabs are for—were for you and also you mentioned earlier that people laughed at the idea of doing peelers here—why?

00:57:33

Kimberly Carroll: Well a long time ago there was a—there were the [Toller] people and they were down there on the Geechee dock and so they had these open pens and they'd put some peeler crabs in there and all and everybody would sit around and drink beer and all that. And then the next morning everyone would see seagulls flying around and all that. And so nobody was tending the crabs and the crabs would either be hard 'cause they get hard in four hours—four hours, or the seagulls would eat up the—eat up the soft shell crabs.

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So whenever we had our mobile shedder down there everybody was a naysayer. They—you know there's a lot of negativity for some reason or you know around this area there's a lot of competitiveness and nobody wants you to do good. They want to do good instead. You know it's just the nature of the beast if you will. So whenever we—Bobby put together that mobile shedder down there and he needed a double hip replacement, he was putting it together in an April gale, it was cold and they were all laughing saying look at that old guy. He can't even hardly walk and he's trying to put together a shedding thing. That will never work and all.

00:58:39

And we shed out like 14,000 crabs that year and he was able to get both of his hip replacements within a month of each other and then we—we ran it down there for three—two or three years. And then moved up to the top of Shem Creek which is actually a better place to be because the water was more pristine, you didn't have the diesel runoff and the sludge from all the boats and all. And so the crabs would live better. And then from there you know we got kicked out of you know up there at Shem Creek. And so they didn't want us there anymore and so we just—Bobby decided that wouldn't hold us back and he built the shedder in the backyard and that was the cat's meow. I mean yeah, it was 24/7 and all that but I mean it—we could just control all the elements of it here at the house and then have them refrigerated and all. And gosh, we—we'd shed out twenty-five, thirty flats of crabs a night and that's three dozen to a flat. So every morning the chefs would be on the phone with me and say, "Hey Kimberly! How many did you shed out last night? How many soft crabs are you going to have for me?" I'd say, "Okay, well I can have you this many." So I'd have like five restaurants and they'd be fighting to get them and all that and then other people would be calling and I'd say, "Wait, wait. I got to see what the production is going to be like before I can bring you on."

00:59:57

But everyone would be waiting for my soft crabs and like I was telling you that—explaining it's—it starts off down there in Florida and works its way up—works its way up. So anyway the Georgia stock would start hitting and the restaurants, they'd start to be getting antsy and say, "Kimberly how much longer before your crabs are in because so and so seafood is calling me and the soft shells are going to hit." I said, "Ah." I said, "I'm looking at about another week with this moon," you know. I said and the water had to be fifty-three degrees or fifty-eight

degrees, you know it's got to be a certain temperature you know for the crabs to go into that. Plus you have to catch up your male crabs, six weeks ahead of time to keep them alive and well because it's the male that you use for the bait to attract the female. And as you get closer to the shed, as you get closer to peeler season all those males are going to run away and go way up river and all that because there's too many girls after them and all. And you can't use crabs out of Virginia or whatever. You got to use the crabs from the water here for the female to go to it.

01:01:02

So if—you know it does no good, you're buying a bushel of crabs for \$300 out of Virginia and whatever and then putting them in your bait well. It's not going to catch the crabs. So we would start by targeting for the jimmies in early March and whatever and you could tell when things were slowing down and all and then you'd have like a ten day lull and then bam. It would be peeler on. You know so that and so there was a lot that went into it and gosh, I just—I caught onto it so fast and I really did well for—for being so adamant about being against it and all that and trying to you know—. Raul was never for it. I don't think Raul had the patience for such a thing. That's what it was.

01:01:49

As far as the stone crabs, they live in a different environment than—than the blue crab do. The stone crab likes to hang out in—in rocky bottom areas. They like to feed on the—on the older bait like the bait that's been sitting a day or whatever to where a blue crab you'll—it'll be today's bait and then you can tell that somebody has fished your pot because when you come back the next day if somebody has fished the pot, okay it sat six hours, those live fresh blue crabs

they're not going to eat the bait that's already six hours old. Your catch is going to be you know and then all you'll have is walk-ins in the bottom and all the crabs in the pot will be gone, okay.

01:02:27

The stone crab they like the older bait that's been sitting there a little while longer and all and then they'll crawl in and so you know good areas around the harbor that are rocky—rocky areas that are not hangs you know and that's where you catch the stone crabs.

01:02:47

Sara Wood: What's a hang?

01:02:48

Kimberly Carroll: Hang, like a—oh gosh, it could be anything, old metal or you know we had Hurricane Hugo here in 1989 so half of Charleston's roofs and structures and the Darby Boat Works and all that is all out there in the harbor. But also cabling, there's a lot of cabling out there in the harbor and things like that. And the rope can get hung around it or whatever, the crab pot get caught on it. I've caught—we've brought up three anchors, one of them is a Confederate anchor but that's been—that's always really cool whenever we bring up the anchors. One of the anchors weighed about 600 pounds, we latched onto off the Coast Guard Station and it took like four hours to make it across the harbor back in and they had to pull it up with a boat lift and put it in the back of our truck and then get it over here to our house. So that's one of the cool things is that you bring up boat anchors—if you're lucky or you know not lucky.

01:03:46

Sara Wood: [*Laughs*] And stone crabs, I just wanted to ask you one more thing. There's—what are the parameters of crabbing stone crabs? I mean you could only take one of their claws at a time?

01:03:55

Kimberly Carroll: Yes, yes. You've got—it's a two and three-quarter—two and three-quarter is the limit size of the claw and then um, so if you have two claws and they're two and three-quarter you can only take the bigger of the two claws. If the crab has only one claw on it, it's got to be thrown back and if the crab has a sponge on the bottom with eggs on it it's got to be thrown back. And anyway if you have two claws on it and one is bigger than the other obviously you take it and you press down and there will be a pressure point between the—the end of the claw and the body and you just catch that pressure and you click it. You don't rip it out because if you do it makes the crab bleed to death and you're destroying the resource. And we used to catch a lot of stone crabs.

01:04:46

Sara Wood: Yeah and—

01:04:47

Kimberly Carroll: Good Lord, sixty, eight. I think the most we ever caught was like 145 pounds in a day. Uh-hm, yeah and it's been a pleasure to be part of outstanding in the field with Sean Brock, Mike Lata, Fig Restaurant, and The Ordinary. The chef's pot luck events out at Middleton Place, being a part of Low Country Local First, being a recipient of the Three Sisters

Award from the Charleston Preservation Society, a member of the Better Business Bureau, let's see, being a part of the movie *Overalls and Aprons* and being a part of the movie *Mind of a Chef* and being part of the Charleston community culinary scene as well as all the good customers of the Lowcountry that visited our retail establishments over the years. It's been such an honor.

01:05:48

Sara Wood: Is there anything else you want to add Kimberly?

01:05:51

Kimberly Carroll: I just love to be a crabber. [*Laughs*]

01:05:55

Sara Wood: Well thank you for being so generous with your time this afternoon. I really appreciate it.

01:05:59

Kimberly Carroll: Thank you.

01:06:02

[End Kimberly Carroll Interview]